Newsletter of the African Burial Ground & Five Points Archaeological Projects

UPDATE

May/June 1997 Vol. 2 No. 3

Update, the newsletter of the African Burial Ground and Five Points Archaeological Projects, is published by the Office of Public Education and Interpretation of the African Burial Ground (OPEI), at 6 World Trade Ctr., Rm. 239, New York, NY 10048, (212) 432-5707, for the purpose of providing current information on New York City's African Burial Ground and its historical context.

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In This Issue...

OPEI CELEBRATES FIFTH ANNIVERSARY!

Dear Update Readers,

May 1997 marks the fifth anniversary of the Office of Public Education and Interpretation of the African Burial Ground Project's (OPEI) Open House Event! The 1991 rediscovery and excavation of the landmark African Burial Ground site has also unearthed and resurrected a renewed interest in the exploration of the African historical presence in early New York.

The contributions of African men, women, and children to the economy and society of colonial America has often been categorically ignored and denied. The history of the enslavement of Africans in the North remains, even today, virtually a well kept secret.

The OPEI, since its inception in 1993, strives to provide information to the New York community, and the public at large, about the on-going status of this historic site and archaeological project. Via slide presentations, quarterly symposia, documentary films, the *Update* newsletter and other educational publications, we have provided information to more than 75,000 individuals, locally, nationally and internationally. Stay tuned, we are currently working on the creation of an African Burial Ground website page!

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you, our very supportive public, our more than one hundred and fifty volunteers and others, for your interest in preserving the history and contributions of Africans living in early America.

Sherrill D. Wilson

Sherrill D. Wilson, Ph.D.
Director

"If we as African Americans don't write our own books, then other folks will continue to define us."
Johnetta B. Cole, President of Spelman College

✈✈✈ LETTERS TO THE EDITOR ✈✈✈

Another Side of Rikers...
On behalf of the students and staff of Rikers Island Educational Facility I want to thank you for your slide presentation. The information included in the presentation was interesting and provided our students with an opportunity to learn about New Yorkers who were previously unknown. The teachers plan to use the classroom guides to enrich our curriculum and we look forward to an ongoing relationship with your office.

Sincerely,
Frank Dody, A.P. Sp.Ed., Adm./Supv.
East Elmhurst, N.Y.

From the State Comptroller
As the State Comptroller, and chief administrator of twenty-two hundred public employees, it is my responsibility to promote the kinds of policies that recognize the achievements of a diverse work force and State. Your participation in the State Comptroller's observance of Black History Month contributes to my own efforts of encouraging and challenging people who serve the interest of the public.

I would personally welcome any further information that you might have on the African Burial Ground and on the history of African Americans in the City of New York. Again, thank you for lending your considerable time and energy to my office's observance of Black History Month.

With warmest regards,
H. Carl McCall, State Comptroller
Albany, N.Y.

Historic Communities
On behalf of the students of the Weeksville School, P.S. 243, I want to thank you for a most informational and inspiring slide presentation on March 7, 1997. It was of particular interest to us, because we are able to find so many comparisons between the Weeksville community of the 19th century, and the African community in lower New York City in the 18th century.

The concept of archaeological digs is of particular interest to some of our students whose family members were among those who found some of the Weeksville remains and memorabilia during the dig for the new "Weeksville Houses," across from our school. Some of the memorabilia is housed in our school. Thank you again for such a wonderful opportunity.

Sincerely,
Saundra C. Johnson, Principal
Brooklyn, N.Y.

"My Trip to the African Burial Ground"
My trip to the African Burial Ground was fun. We learned about archaeology and anthropology. Some of the bones were found with arms in different ways. Some of them were found holding babies. I learned that excavation means dig. We saw very interesting things. I learned that African Americans died because they did not have enough food to eat. We saw different kinds of bones. One of the bones had waistbeads. They put coverings up to protect the skeletons. We learned about artifacts.

Krystelle Katherine Diaz
P.S. 134/ Class 3-324
New York, N.Y.

Concerned Black Men...
My visit to your organization with the Concerned Black Men group was far more than excellent. I am convinced that all the students who attended, as well as the adults, appreciated the vital knowledge on the history and future of the enslaved New York African men, women and children too. I will always remember the extraordinary knowledge learned and will continue to promote and uplift the African Burial Ground Project. Please do not end your essential works.

Sincerely,
Clinton L. Black, Educator
Washington, D.C.

African Burial Grounds in Canada
Thank you for your letter and the enclosed documentation on the African Burial Ground and Five Points Archaeological Projects. I have shared this information with a number of groups here in Montreal.

I am enclosing all of the newspaper articles which I have found regarding the burial grounds of enslaved Africans in Saint-Armand Station. I will keep you informed of further developments regarding the efforts of many individuals and groups to have the governments here recognize this burial ground as having archaeological and historic value.

Thank you.
John Leblanc
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

[Ed. Note: For information regarding the St. Armand-Station Burial Ground see the African Burial Ground Update section -- Related Events page 9]

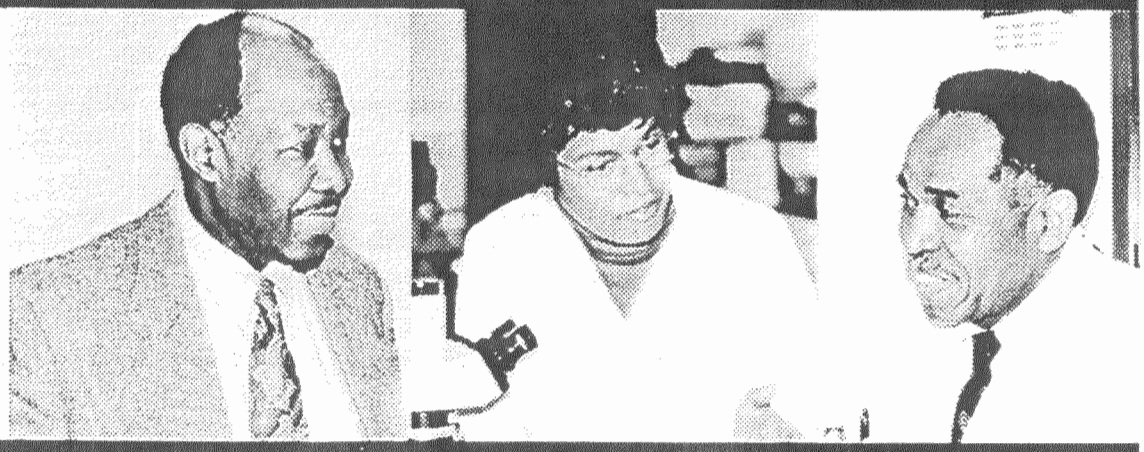
OPEI welcomes letters but reserves the right to edit for length or clarity

THE FOLEY SQUARE LABORATORY REPORT:

An Interview with Roland Harris and John Boyd of the U.S. Customs Lab

Compiled by
Cheryl J. LaRoche

Photo credits:
Tamara R. Jubilee



Pictured from left to right: John Boyd, Jr., Cheryl J. LaRoche, a conservator in the Foley Square Laboratory, and Roland (Ron) Harris.

Introduction

This interview was inspired by the retirement of John Boyd, Jr. after 35 years of employment with the U.S. Customs Laboratory. John and Roland Harris are both analytical chemists who have selflessly, eagerly and generously lent their time and expertise as a professional courtesy to the African Burial Ground Project. With their help, we hope to use what we learn from the analysis of these artifacts to further tell us about the customs, rituals, practices and beliefs of the people who buried their dead in the African Burial Ground.

Cheryl LaRoche: I wanted to interview you both in order to call attention to the help you have given us on the African Burial Ground Project. First, provide a brief explanation of why U.S. Customs has analytical services and give us your feelings about the African Burial Ground Project.

John Boyd: Right now we are dealing with the inorganic and organic metals and different types of commodities that come into the United States for tariff purposes. We also deal with domestic problems such as the ones that you are here to discuss. This is part of our outreach program and it has been a pleasure to work on the African Burial Ground Project for my own gratification. This project has unveiled some of the things that happened to Blacks in history. We have lost much of this history through not being able to record these important events. It is rewarding that I can help because I am a part of this heritage.

Roland Harris: I have been with the Customs Laboratory for over nine years and prior to that I worked with New York City's Police Department forensic laboratory. My interest in looking at some of the artifacts, as well as helping with this project, also stems from my heritage. This is one of the most important finds we have had in recent years, which adds to the entire history of the city. We have yet to realize the benefits that are going to come from the project. I am very excited about being able to help and about having the ability to be able to help simply because this find would have gone completely unnoticed if we did not have people who were interested enough to make sure that people stood up and paid attention in order to save this bit of history. It is vital in terms of helping people to understand what has gone before, and to bring us up to date as to where we are today.

CL: One of the things that has been so important in our relationship with you is that in many instances we are dealing with very small, extremely *degraded* artifacts and are trying as best we can to have these artifacts help us put together the full story of the burial ground. Obviously, Dr. Blakey, in working with his analysis of the human remains, is contributing the major portion of the information that we will need to know, but in extracting the kinds of analytical information that you provide, we are able to continue to tell the story based on the artifacts. For example, from the glass beads recovered with Burial 340, which is how we initially began our relationship, we have moved on to looking at coffin wood identification with you.

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Left: Ron Harris prepares sample for analysis. Wood is a cellulosic material which deteriorates over time. It has been recovered in fragmented form from the burial site.

Right: Surviving remnants of coffin wood have been determined to be primarily cedar and pine. Other types of soft wood identified are spruce, larch, and fir. There are a few hard woods yet to be identified.

Now we are back to look at coffin wood surfaces which may be pigmented, painted or colored. You have helped us analyze the artifacts to a level not normally enjoyed by archaeologists. This is the result of the kinds of tests that you've been able to provide. Would you discuss in every day terms, the kinds of information we look for?

JB: Well initially we had a superficial analysis of the artifacts. As we began to get information and data, we began to get more deeply into the analytical part of the artifacts. We went from different instrumentation procedures such as non-destructive X-ray analysis, and emission spectrophotomic analysis. We did a little X-ray diffraction analysis, and microscope analysis.

We are looking forward to some investigation using NMR analysis and maybe *Carbon 13 analysis*. The problem is that the analysis we have to perform should be non-destructive analysis, but because the artifacts are so fragile, it is very difficult to extract the data we want.

CL: We were lucky with that silver earbob because we were able to take some crust off and take a small discrete shaving. Would you like to speak about the test that we ran?

[Ed. note: the silver earbob was recovered from Burial 254 a child of five to seven years old. It was featured in our previous issue of Update, Vol. 2. No. 2]

JB: We were astonished by the amount of information we gathered through the use of the emission spectrophotomic analysis of those small pieces you extracted without destroying anything. We were proud of that. The data that we got was very enlightening. Also, I am accustomed to formal protocol in analyzing materials but in this case we did some experimental procedures and we came out with reasonable data.

CL: We also have a number of coffin wood samples. Wood is a *cellulosic material* that often does not survive adverse archaeological conditions. We do have small pieces of wood and wooden posts, so one of our research questions has been to identify what types of woods were used for coffins and if those woods were indigenous to New York.

Ron Harris has been helping us establish a protocol because the wood has been so badly degraded that it does not even withstand sample taking. Ron, please speak about the work we have been doing together.

RH: Among the problems encountered tered are *embrittled wood samples* which have resulted from the archaeological environment. Some of the samples were petrified and yet it did not go into a complete *petrification state*, while others would literally crumble in your hand. We had to come up with a device to solidify them sufficiently enough so we could make micrographic slides in order to identify the wood. We went to several types of *reagents* and *fixers* to try to come up with one that would be suitable for identification purposes. We were able, after a period of time, to develop some processes using various types of chemicals, to actually stabilize the samples sufficiently to get some type of identification.

The whole process of identifying wood is an involved task. First, we had to make a determination as to what type of wood was indigenous to this area at that particular time. We looked at the samples and were able to come up with two identifiable species; one was pine and the other was cedar. We have since identified several other types. In looking at this region, we know these particular woods were indigenous to this area. We also know what type of wood should have been available when these coffins were originally made.

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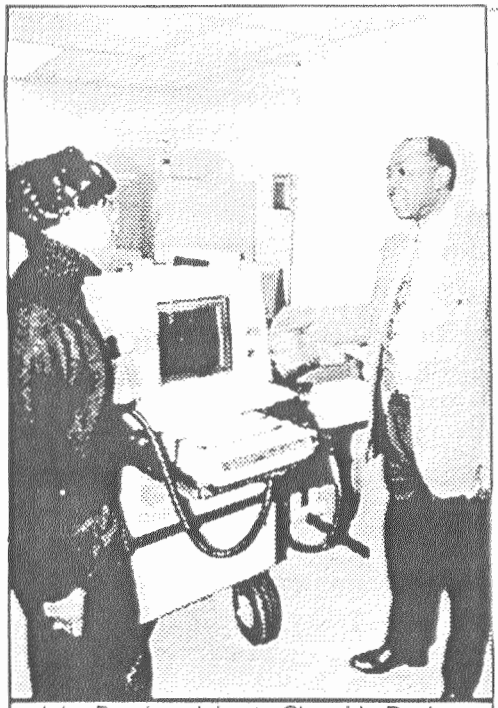


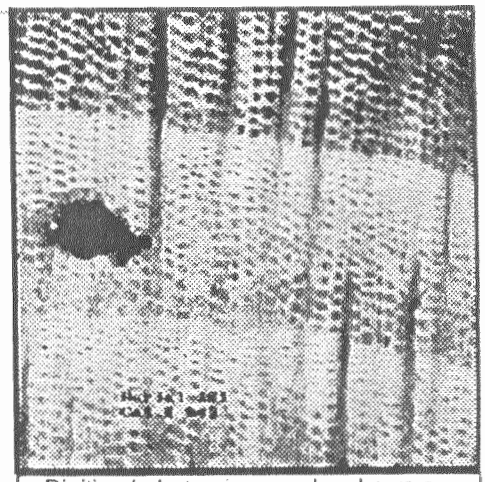
John Boyd explains to Cheryl LaRoche how the control panel of the X-ray fluorescence unit is programmed.

CL: It has been a particularly difficult process because to identify wood you have to look for a number of characteristics when you take your sample. In the ideal world these characteristics are very robust and prominent. In this case we are often making our identification on the most slender of characteristics because the degradation has been so extreme. The extent of the damage is such that you spend a good bit of time making your determinations. It has been slow going.

RH: Yes, I have to agree. You look at the wood and make the identification on minute quantities in order to determine species. When you have wood that has been damaged to the extent this has, and been subjected to the elements, it is very difficult to actually get whole pieces of sufficient quality to see the identifying characteristics such as the *morphology* of the sample down to the cellular structure in terms of making an identification under a *polarizing light microscope*. If you are not able to see these cellular structures all the way down to the *pit levels*, it is very difficult to make determinations. However, we were fortunate that we did have pieces sufficiently intact to make the identification; it proved a challenge to get to that point.

CL: Yes, it was a challenge (laughter). We're here today because we have one further analytical problem that we would like to investigate. We have some coffin lids that may or may not have some type of *colorant* applied to the surface. We have to make a determination about whether what we are seeing on the surface is some naturally occurring substance in the soil such as a clay based material that would naturally pigment or color the surface of the wood, or whether or not we are looking at some deliberate additive that may have been placed on the surface of the wood for some sort of decoration, or whether it was a method to pigment the surface of the coffin.

We have soil samples from the surrounding areas to see if the elements that appear in the soil also appear in the *colorants* on the surface of the wood. We also have random coffin samples that appear to be in the same color range. Much of what we are basing the need for further testing on is visual appearance. Normally we have a particular color range that we expect to see for wood. Even degraded wood falls into a particular range of colors and these wood samples are outside that range, so we will be talking to John about the types of tests we may be able to run.



Digitized photomicrography shows a cross section of larch shaving cellular structure and resin canals from Burial 101. Photo credit: C.J. LaRoche

JB: Certainly we can run analysis on the soil samples. If we have soil samples versus the material on the surface of the coffins, we should be able to come up with some type of conclusion as to whether the two types of materials are the same. We can use various types of instrumentation as well as microscopic examination. I would assume that I would be using the emission spectrograph to determine the type of elements that are in both the soil as well as the material on the surface of the coffins. And then we could go from there as to what other instrumentation would be necessary to connect those elements as compounds of inorganic materials or compounds of degradation of organic pigments.

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CL: Let's shift the questioning slightly to talk about a recent trend. I have read in the writings of Cornell West and heard in Dr. Blakey's discussions, the ideal of scholarly activism. I see both of you contributing your expertise in this area as part of the scholarly activist ideal. In anthropology, they also talk about the engaged scholar. Is there anything you would like to add in terms of being able to use what you have been trained to do for this project?

RH: With any amount of learning I think it is very important that you share and more importantly, if you know something, I think the only way you are going to be able to demonstrate that you know is if you share. For me the most important aspect of this entire investigation is being able to help in terms of some of the analysis.

The whole impact of being a part of this learning experience, in imparting learning to others, will have no real relevance unless we are able to pass what we are learning on to those who follow us.

In this endeavor, and every other endeavor, we learn from doing and passing it on. We look forward to having different agencies combine their knowledge in terms of collaborating with one another in order to be able to come up with something that is going to help us progress. I think that these are important aspects of this find.

JB: And what are we going to do with the information we have? We need to have that information put into the neighborhoods, into the schools so that our youth can know that we have scientists who are willing to give their time and talents to this project.

This is a project that is certainly necessary so that the people in this country will know that we are not all about race riots, that we are an important people in America and that we are willing to do research to uncover some of the vast amount of information that is out there that we, all of us, should be aware of. Blacks have a prominent place in our society and more of this type of work should be done.

CL: I am happy that we are talking to you at the end of a long, illustrious career. I want to thank you both, not just for your time, because you have been extremely generous, but also to let *Update* readers know that there is a lot of work that goes on behind the scenes.

Glossary of Terms

Carbon 13 Analysis: A stable, non-radioactive carbon isotope used for analytical research and a component of C-14 dating

Cellulosic Material: Plant materials with cells as their major structural or morphological component

Degraded/Degradation: Breakdown, weakening or deterioration of the internal and/or external structure of a substance or artifact

Embrittled wood samples: When a substance becomes hard and rigid and loses tensile strength or ability to be stretched causing it to break easily and crumble

Petrified/petrifaction: To harden or convert into stone through a process of mineral replacement of organic components

Reagent: Any substance used in a reaction for the purpose of detecting, measuring, examining, or analyzing other substances

Fixers (fixative): A substance that hardens objects for microscopic examination

Morphology: The form or structure of an organism or material

Polarizing light microscope: A microscope which allows light to transmit or pass through a transparent sample

Colorant: A substance which adds color either by chemical change or physical application

Pit levels: A void or circular feature in the cell walls of soft woods which have some diagnostic value

AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND PROJECT PROFILES

Deborah A. Wright

Leona Sellers recently received an African Burial Ground Project volunteer award in recognition of her "long term support and activism." Included in the first wave of OPEI volunteers, Leona exemplifies the meaning behind "cornerstone of support."

Born the third of seven children in Harlem, New York, Leona was raised by her now deceased parents in Bronx's Clason Point Houses originally built by Mayor LaGuardia for returning servicemen and their families. Leona received her Associate Degree in Medical Laboratory Technology from Staten Island Community College and her B.A. in Business Information Systems from Pace University. Retired after nineteen years as a commercial loan specialist with the Prudential Real Estate Division, she resides in historic lower Manhattan near the South Street Seaport.

Quite aptly, it was in her church, Mariners' Temple Baptist Church where Leona first heard about the African Burial Ground (ABG). Reverend Dr. Susan D. Johnson Cook announced one Sunday morning that skeletal remains had been recovered from the site where a federal agency was attempting to erect a new office building. The Reverend expressed concerns about the manner in which the remains were being handled, and called for members to take an active interest. "Since this information was denied me as a child growing up in New York," Leona recalled, "I was looking for and found a forum with which I could find out more about the contributions of my African forefathers and mothers and learn about how they lived."

When the OPEI began supporting an

OPEI Volunteer Leona Sellers

Photo credit: D. Wright

ABG commemorative stamp petition drive, Leona was one of the main persons working with Mr. Richard Brown in support of this effort. Mr. Brown, a former member of the now disbanded Federal Steering Committee, spearheaded the idea of an ABG stamp in response to the question, "How can we better inform the American people about the ABG?" Mr. Brown's answer was a stamp, stating that he felt that stamps relate history in a variety of ways. Stamps tell a story concisely, visually, are collectible, and therefore can reach many and teach for generations to come.

Leona, who gathered a significant number of the signed petitions, recounts her experiences as being both challenging and frustrating. She accompanied Mr. Brown to Washington, D.C., where a meeting had been scheduled with top officials of the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee (CSAC), only to find the said officials suddenly on vacation leave. They arrived with over 65,000 signatures, to add to the 25,000 which had been submitted a year earlier. To the dismay of all the signees, and those who worked hard at gaining signatures, we later learned that the second request for an ABG stamp was rejected. There are currently over 103,000 signatures on file.

Although the momentum for the commemorative stamp has slowed down, Leona states that she feels "We need to push forward to make our cause heard, and I hope that this effort will regain momentum and more people will get involved to make Mr. Brown's vision and hard work come to realization."

Leona finds joy in volunteering, indicating that it helps in a person's self-development and gives something back to the community. She currently divides her volunteer time between four other organizations.

As for the future, Leona says that she is looking forward to the reinterment of the ABG ancestors, but presently feels that it is now time for the community to take an active role in overseeing all phases of the ABG project. "Let us not miss this opportunity to leave something for our children that will give them a sense of knowing who they are and what they can be."

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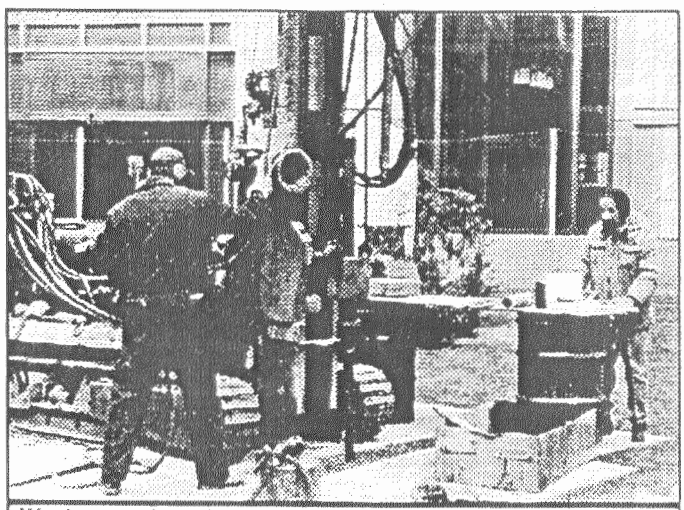
[Editors Note: Recently Mr. Brown lost his beloved wife of over 45 years. We at OPEI acknowledge his selfless work on behalf of the ABG. Our love and prayers go out to him as he heals and recovers from his tremendous loss. This revised article originally appeared in The Cornerstone, OPEI's volunteer newsletter (Vol. 1 No. 2).]

African Burial Ground Update

Compiled by Emilyn L. Brown
Photographs by Tamara R. Jubilee

❑ **On March 17, 18, and 19, 1997, the General Services Administration conducted a series of ground studies of the African Burial Ground which had a two fold purpose.** The first was to assess how well the ground surface could support outdoor memorialization such as sculpture. Secondly, the tests were part of the first phase in planning the reinterment of the 427 burials currently under analysis at Howard University. Reinterment is tentatively scheduled for the year 2000.

OPEI Director Sherrill D. Wilson, Public Educators Marie-Alice Devieux, Donna Harden Cole, Deinabo George, Chadra D. Pittman and OPEI staff photographer, Tamara R. Jubilee, were on hand to answer questions from the public.



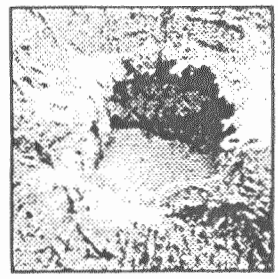
Workmen placed protective boards under the machinery and lowered long metal rods into the ground.

By using long metal pipes to bore into the ground, engineers were able to determine how much compaction or settling of fill had occurred. There is approximately 30 feet of fill between the ground surface and at least 200 remains which are still interred at the site. The borings reportedly probed to depths of 20 feet within the fill, a mixture of sterile soil and sand used to preserve the burials.

Inquiries concerning plans for reinterment, or the proposed memorialization for the interior area of the 290 Broadway Interpretive Center and exterior area where the African Burial Ground is located, are being directed to Ms. Peggy King Jorde at 212-264-6949.

Left: Public Educator Chadra D. Pittman observes the effects of the machinery.

Below right: Close up of a boring measuring approximately 3 1/4" in diameter. About four or five borings were made at the site.



❑ **This year's Annual OPEI Youth Symposium was held March 23, 1997.** **See page 12 for details.**

❑ **On April 19, 1997, coinciding with four years of national historic landmark status for the African Burial Ground, a training symposium was held to recruit volunteers interested in "Spreading the Word" about the site and the historical contributions of Africans in early New York.** The day began with a noon-time prayer vigil at the site after which trainees were given the full scope of the project including such current issues as memorialization. One of the highlights of the day was "Taste from the Past," a mini-lecture presented by Volunteer Coordinator Donna Harden Cole. For details see page 14.

OPEI's volunteer staff, currently numbering at more than 150, receive free training in order to keep the public aware of issues concerning the burial site. Interested? Call (212) 432-5707 for details.

❑ **Archaeological Findings at Foley Square.** In early April an engineering team from The RBA Group began test excavations to locate existing utility lines. The work was conducted under a permit issued by the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

Excavations reached depths of about five feet when part of an intact brick wall was uncovered. It is fairly certain that the brick dates back to the 19th century.

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In compliance with Landmark Preservation Commission guidelines, the excavation came to an abrupt halt when a number of bones were found at the site. Len Bianchi reports that workmen stopped excavation pending analysis. There was concern that the crew had encountered disturbed or redeposited till from excavations that took place at the African Burial Ground, and that the recovered bones were human. Analysis later determined that a large 10" bone recovered belonged to a pig or possibly a sheep. Other bones recovered were identified as having come from chickens.

In 1991, the General Services Administration (GSA) simultaneously excavated the neighboring sites of the African Burial Ground and the Foley Square area for the 290 Broadway building and the federal court house at 500 Pearl Street.

❑ RELATED ITEMS:

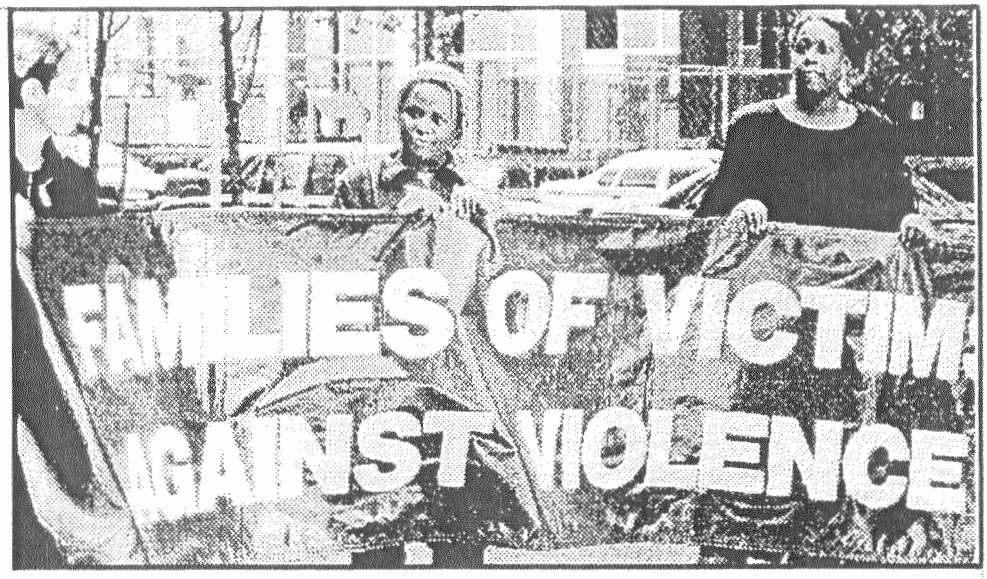
Reclamation of Saint-Armand Station African Burial Ground recalls lives of freedom in the "Promised Land."
Faced with lives of bondage, Africans resisted enslavement in countless ways. One of the primary means of escape became the Underground Railroad, an arduous journey that called for strong faith and reliance on the North Star as a guide to "Canaan, the Promised Land." Canadian newspaper sources like the *New Brunswick Telegraph Journal* place the number of Africans who escaped across the U.S. border during the 18th and 19th centuries at ten to sixty thousand.

Curiously only a small number of cemeteries where Africans are known to be buried have been identified including: Shelburne in Nova Scotia; Princeville in Ontario and Dresden also in Ontario. The fourth, Saint-Armand Station in the Eastern Township of Quebec, is now the focus of a campaign spearheaded by Hank Avery whose goal is to gain landmark recognition for the site. He confirms that some 30 Africans interred there were part of a small community established in the 18th century. Use of the cemetery stopped sometime after 1909, the year of the last documented burial. The site is now part of a farm owned by French Canadian Clement Benoit since 1950. Avery became involved when rumors about desecration at the site surfaced. Benoit has admitted that years ago he unknowingly bulldozed the area, uncovering skeletal remains, but maintains there have been no recent incidents.

The burials face a large black limestone rock which is the only identifying feature of the neglected site. *Adding gross insult to injury, the Saint-Armand cemetery is widely referenced on maps and documents as "Nigger Rock."*

Efforts to gain recognition for the burial ground have begun to gather support from a number of sources including the Mayor of Saint-Armand Station, the Town Council and the Missiquoi County Historical Society. But negotiations with Benoit to build a monument and organize tours at the farm site have hit a snag.

There has also been some resistance to changing the cemetery's name. Avery's preference is to rename the site "Slave Rock." But this has raised concerns as well. It has now become a question of whether the name of the historic site should reflect their circumstance of being enslaved or their heroic efforts to be free.



Mothers Against Violence Rally at the African Burial Ground.
On Sunday, May 11, 1997, Families of Victims Against Violence (FOVAV) held their fourth annual Mothers Day March Against Violence. The group, founded and organized by Reverend Herbert Daughtry, pastor of The House of the Lord Church in Brooklyn, supports community members who have lost their loved ones and friends to violence.

After church services, more than fifty participants walked over the Brooklyn Bridge to the African Burial Ground carrying banners (see above) a memorial quilt, photos and cherished mementos of their loved ones.

Rev. Daughtry, quoted in the *Daily Challenge*, explained: "We chose the African Burial Ground because we wanted to make a connection between the killing of our ancestors by racist, plantation owners and the killing of our loved ones today at our own hands. It would be a magnanimous gesture, and a great show of support, if greater numbers would join us. Also, it would make a statement of our stand against violence."

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ARE YOU ON OUR MAILING LIST?
Please submit names and/or corrections to:

OPEI, 6 World Trade Ctr.,
U.S. Custom House, Rm. 239
New York, New York 10048

COMMUNITY VOICES

Compiled by Donna Harden Cole

Question submitted by D. Wright:
Across the United States there are excavations being conducted on the former plantations where enslaved Africans lived and worked, as well as the cemeteries where they were buried. ***What potential does this have for imparting a sense of identity for the African American community, and what forums or steps do you feel need to be implemented to assure that African Americans be included in all processes related to these excavations?***

Mr. Mandingo O. Tshaka
Pres. Bayside Clear-Spring Council Civic Association
Flushing, New York
First of all, I have an aversion against excavating the dead. Digging up cemeteries just for the sake of digging them up is unnecessary. Certain people are always digging up other peoples' graves. Why aren't they digging up their own? There are black burial grounds which have been made into parks. For example, Martins' Field in Flushing, the former site of an African American and Native American cemetery, was unearthed in 1936 and made into a park/playground, although official documents indicate that there was a restricted deed on the property. I am working with other concerned citizens towards getting this historic area landmarked. I've even gone as far as speaking to Dan Pagano from Landmarks about this matter. Landmarking the area will help to preserve something tangible from our history like what is happening at the African Burial Ground in Lower Manhattan.

However, under the circumstances associated with the African Burial Ground of lower Manhattan, I do agree that the research being conducted at the prestigious Howard University by Dr. Blakey is beneficial to the community and to the world. This will assist with unveiling a lot of information on African American history. This will help give us some information about what was important to us, about our culture. Finding out information allows us to have a context for understanding what happened. These types of investigations are good because they help confirm or dispute what's in the records if they exist.

For example, in 1996 New York City hired archaeologist, Linda Stone to do a survey of Martins' Field which was called the Colored Cemetery of Flushing. Ms. Stone discovered that there were at least 1,000 burials or more associated with this "Colored" cemetery which now is actually located in the midst of a predominately white neighborhood.

This historic site is very dear to me especially since there is evidence due to the study done by Ms. Stone that some of those buried may be ancestors of mine. On the four headstones found, the family name Bunn is evident on each one. Bunn is my family name. For example, Alfred E. Bunn was laid to rest in April of 1876 at the age of 3 years, George H. Bunn died in January of 1887 at the age of 17 and James Bunn was buried in August of 1890. Incidentally, the study also revealed that almost half of that burial population were children. The deed states that it was started in 1840, but it could go back further than that because Blacks could not be buried within city limits, the same rules that existed in Manhattan. Since Africans have been in Flushing since 1693, they must have been buried somewhere.

Therefore, you can see how information that can be retrieved from historic burial sites can be beneficial and can be viewed as a relevant source of history and culture to those that it represents. However, when burial sites are found no matter how long they have been hidden, it is important that we not build over them but give them the utmost respect and attention.

Vinnie Deasmore
Independent Consultant on African Burial Grounds, South Carolina
Well, in South Carolina the only source of any action to excavate is through the state. However, in most places, the laws currently in place do not allow for a variety of situations involving excavations of burial grounds. I believe that nationwide there needs to be greater regulation regarding archaeological digs of burial grounds. The rules now merely apply to active or known burial grounds. There have been instances, for example where headstones from obscure burial sites have been thrown into the river.

To counteract this type of insensitive removal, surveys need to be taken throughout the state archival system to retrieve information regarding the location of African Burial Grounds, wherever they may be. Some of the historic cemeteries are now underground and located under private property. The state should provide an open telephone line in the case where a private citizen may find a cemetery under their property. However I do realize that inventory of these type of cemeteries would be difficult because there are also some located in secluded, highly wooded areas.

I have found that in many cases the developers who contract for excavation do not particularly care about what or who they are excavating. Perhaps closer monitoring can be put in place.

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This would include acquiring archaeologists who are sensitive to burial populations like those found here in South Carolina, New York and throughout the country.

In the case where a burial ground is "accidentally discovered" while construction is going on, I can agree that an investigation would be very beneficial. Information resulting from such a study could reveal certain facts that were unknown before. However, I do not believe that all of the remains found should have to be studied or analyzed for this purpose. If by chance a burial ground is uncovered in the process of clearing the land for use and there was no information regarding its existence available beforehand , then I can accept the prospects for an excavation of some of the burials.

Vincent F.A. Golphin, Associate Publisher
about...time Magazine
Rochester, New York

Each year in Auburn, New York, a small but devoted group of African Methodist Episcopal Zion clergy, faithful and interested in African American history, make a pilgrimage to the grave of Harriet Tubman. For the sake of brevity, the now-dead abolitionist is remembered as "Moses," called that by historians for the hundreds of enslaved Africans she led to freedom in the North. Young people are often told of her simple rule -- be free, or die -- as a way to show how serious she was with her escaping charges. A fact often recalled is that Tubman never lost an escapee. They all made it through.

The annual pageant is given scant coverage by Central New York newspapers, but it remains a part of the permanent record of the region. More importantly, anyone who stands in the quiet cemetery near her grave cannot help but be moved by the reality of her existence.

The first time I made the trip Tubman and all her exploits, before and after the Civil War, became more real for me. The graveside memorial, mostly a recounting of her story and a few prayers, brings forth the reality of her life even more than a visit to her homestead. Her house and property are being developed and preserved as an Auburn tourist attraction by the AME Zion Church.

Granted, most African Americans are not anxious to visit cemeteries, but experiences such as the Tubman pilgrimage can have a powerful affect. The presence of regular visitors make it more likely that the final resting place of important African Americans such as Harriet Tubman, and many people less well known, will be groomed properly by cemetery officials. Also, as death is the final stage of life, those sites make history come alive. It helps children and others to realize the individuals read about and discussed at cultural festivals are not myths. This is particularly important in times such as these when some white scholars are poised to attack the claims of African and African American history.

Excavations on former plantations make it possible to preserve and understand a chapter in American history that many conservatives say we should forget. They also prevent people from denying the existence and severity of the experience of enslaved Africans.

African American preservationists might consider pulling together annual pilgrimages to significant grave sites and excavations in every city. "Lay Down Body" by Roberta Hughes Wright and Wilbur B. Hughes III, a 370 page, state by state guide to African American burial grounds and cultural history, is the best source for information on the subject. It is published by NOMIS Publications, Box 5122, Youngstown, Ohio 1-800-321-7479. Another interesting source is the Internet. At least 125 web sites provide information on such places.

I have visited African American cemeteries throughout the nation. The interest arose out of my curiosity as a researcher. Every burial place leads to a group of stories about how the people lived and died. Those stories provide lessons and inspirations for us.

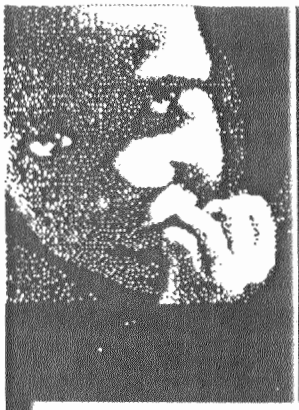
Richard Dickenson, Borough Historian
Staten Island, New York

In terms of identity this is very important. The Civil Rights movement actually helped to bring more attention to the importance of identity, i.e, Black power. This assisted the Black community in understanding that the legacy of enslavement was not something that African Americans should continue to be ashamed of.

Information retrieved from the cemeteries which are excavated, as in the case of the African Burial Ground in Lower Manhattan, is a another way to capture Black heritage and culture. Perhaps this type of investigation can encourage more African Americans to realize the importance of their many contributions during enslavement.

Although this type of investigation is important and can shed light on the history it is also important to get the legislation necessary to protect such efforts. Government regulations and judicial decisions need to be passed to assist with this. African Americans should understand that the power of elections, electing those to public office who can empathize and sympathize with the needs of the community.

Then there should be efforts to disseminate this information via a variety of mediums, i.e., television, videos, the internet, CD-ROMs and of course, via the various forms of printed mediums. The burden falls upon all of us to bring attention to these types of investigations. We should work effortlessly to not lay down our burden but to embrace it and allow information like this to flourish.



Investing in Our Future: Teaching Our Youth about The African Burial Ground

Essay by Emilyn L. Brown & Tamara R. Jubilee
Photos by Tamara R. Jubilee

Dr. Joe Jackson, keynote speaker for this years Youth Symposium

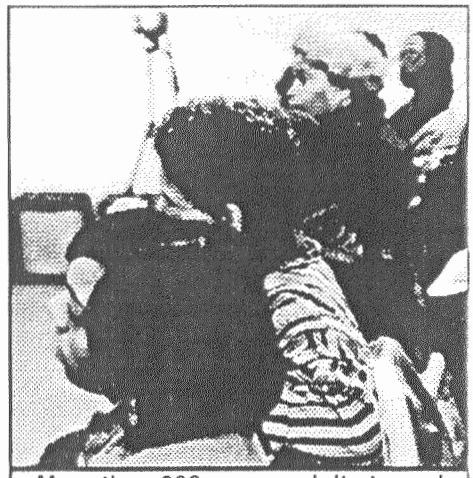
"Investing in education is an investment in our future." These words, provided by keynote speaker Dr. Joe Jackson, seemed to make a strong impact on the young men and women attending this year's youth symposium. At his request the attendees repeated the names of the first known Africans enslaved in Manhattan -- Paulo Angola, Simon Congo, Big Manuel, Little Manuel, Manuel de Gerrit de Reus, Anthony Portuguis Garcia, and Peter Santomee to name a few. Dr. Jackson then began his presentation linking the historical accomplishments of this early community with the goals of the descendant community.

What follows is an excerpt from his well received speech which issued a challenge to our youth to use the early accomplishments of this small African community as an inspiration for their own success:

"We stand on strong shoulders of generations of Africans who although in bondage, nurtured a culture, maintained traditions, and kept alive a deep thirst for freedom, strong connections, and feelings for community, conditions unmatched by any other group. Those Africans of the 17th century provided a model for all of us.

They had high achievement orientation, particularly in the area of occupational and educational aspirations. From the manner in which the bodies were discovered in the African Burial Ground, I know without a doubt that even in death our ancestors were people of high morals and a strong commitment of values. They were a spiritual people. What a legacy!"

Dr. Michael L. Blakey, Scientific Director of the Project, was on hand to provide an update on the analysis of the skeletal remains taking place at Howard University. He informed the audience



More than 200 young adults turned out for this year's Youth Symposium

that the Cobb Laboratory staff is approximately three years short of concluding research on the human remains recovered from the site. Once research is completed, a report on the overall findings will eventually be released. Directing his remarks to the youthful audience, he explained the significance of the findings. "It is as though you are sitting at the foot of our earliest ancestors, learning what you can about their lives. These ancestors made us possible, we owe them. And if we continue to engage in reciprocity and respect for them, then we will benefit from the same kind of respect and the yet unborn will benefit from the society that will be built."

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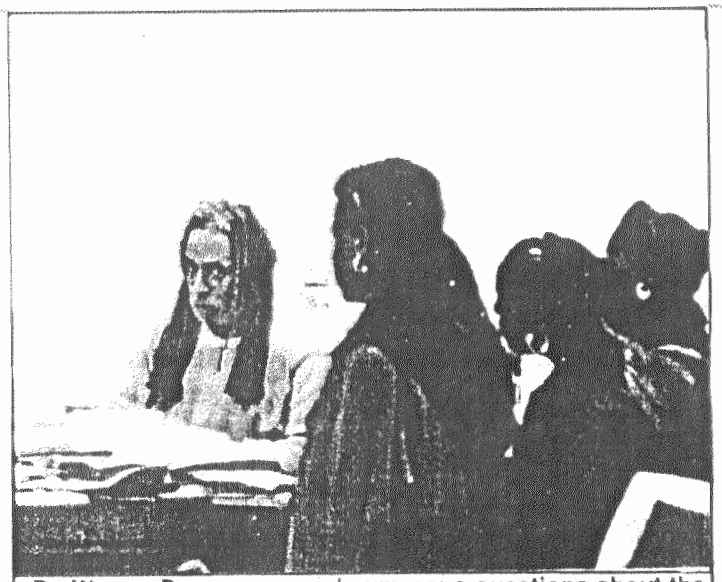
Other events of the day included Laboratory tours where Dr. Warren Perry, Director of Archaeology for the project, pictured right, provided a historical context for the approximately 600 artifacts recovered from the site. "We are at the descriptive stage of the analysis" he indicated. "We are no where near the stage at which the Howard University Laboratory is with the skeletal materials. We're just beginning to describe the work that has been done."

The laboratory staff has been successful in identifying many of the artifacts recovered from the site including bracelets, cufflinks, conch shells and some kinds of decorative items. Coffin hardware -- the nails and screws used to hold coffins together -- now represent the largest number of artifacts recovered from the site.

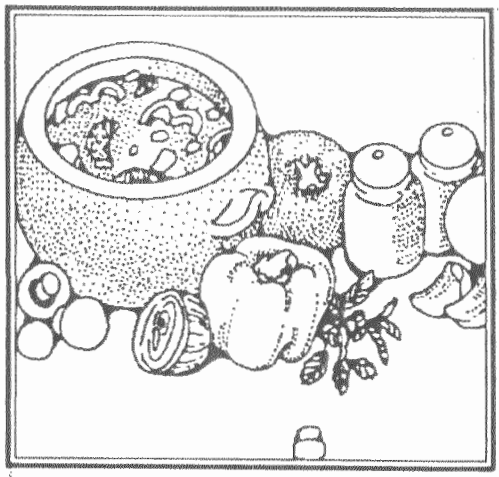
Dr. Perry is also analyzing the burial demographics of the site; how the men, women and children are buried, and if their burials form a particular pattern. For example when they were buried were they grouped in different parts of the burial ground by gender? Or were men, women and children evenly distributed throughout the burial ground? Referring to the soft woods used for many of their coffins, Dr. Perry reminded the group that this type of wood, considered less expensive than hard woods like oak, tell us something about the burial population. "We have to remember who these people are in the African Burial Ground. Some were very poor individuals. I would describe them as having poor materials but a rich spirit."

Site tours of the African Burial Ground and the interior of 290 Broadway where commemorative art is on display rounded out the day's events. Pictured right Public Educator Deinabo George offers comments concerning the New Ring Shout, a cosmogram designed by Houston Conwill, sculptor, Joseph DePace, architect and graphic artist and Estella Conwill Majozo, poet. The cosmogram was designed to pay tribute to the men, women and children of the African Burial Ground.



Dr. Warren Perry answered numerous questions about the recovered artifacts for young visitors to the lab.

Deinabo George offers details about the significance of the "New Ring Shout," one of several works of commemorative art installed at the 290 Broadway site.



A Taste From The Past

Donna Harden Cole

According to The Colonial Cook-book, by Lucille Recht Penner, many of the European arrivals in old New York were ill prepared to live off the land. These new arrivals, especially the Dutch who arrived in 1623 and the British succeeding them in 1664, were mostly town people, i.e., shopkeepers, laborers and artisans.

The colonists having little knowledge of cultivating American soil, needed to depend heavily on the Native Americans as well as Africans for their survival in the new world. Native Americans for example, taught Europeans how to choose wild plants safe for consumption. These would include mushrooms,onions,dandelion greens and a variety of wild berries.

West Africans contributed substantially to European knowledge of soil cultivation methods as well. We know, for example, that agriculture was a main source of such foodstuffs as grains, root crops and legumes in Africa. In addition, animal husbandry was another source for food gathering, i.e. meat, milk and fish. However, for many African countries foods obtained agriculturally were considered more important than using fishing and hunting methods. Indeed, West Africans may have been acquired because of their knowledge of agricultural techniques of soil irrigation, planting and weeding. European settlers were able to survive especially due to their adaptation to cultivating corn which proved to be a major staple of the colonial menu.

Corn, known in the Indian language of Taino as maize meaning "our life," was unknown to Europeans. Native Americans taught the colonists about planting methods and how to prepare corn which was found to be easy to grow. It was prepared in a variety of ways i.e., boiled, roasted, or ground into flour for bread.

Hunting and fishing were still more survival tactics Native Americans shared with Europeans.These settlers trapped such wild fowls as turkey which were double the size of the modern turkey bred on a farm and weighing in at 30 to 40 pounds. It is all of these elements which combine to create a "taste from the past."

G.D. Stringfield surmised in an short essay entitled "African American Cooking in Old New York" that African Americans and Native Americans formed strong relationships. This coming together also influenced the adaptability of foods and food preparation among them as well as among the Dutch and the British in New York.

To commemorate the historic relationship which evolved between African Americans and natives of North America especially, Stringfield in her essay chose a recipe designed by Dr. S.D. Wilson as a representation of this synthesis of foodways and culture. The recipe is for "Peanut-Corn Soup." The ingredients include corn and turkey native to North America and the peanut which originated in Africa. Soup, incidentally, was eaten in large quantities by the colonists.

It could be prepared using a variety of ingredients and a week's serving could be made using large iron kettles which were hung on the back of the fireplace.

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"Historic Peanut-Corn Soup"

Saute eight sliced carrots, and three sliced onions in vegetable oil until soft then drain the oil.

Add three cans of clear chicken broth in a large pot followed by two cans of niblet corn and simmer for ten minutes.

Add the meat of two baked turkey legs or three wings, two cups of hot water, and stir in one half cup of creamy Peanut Butter.

Cook over low heat for 30 minutes stirring occasionally (option: Add sliced mushrooms)

Serve with Hot buttered Corn Bread. Serves six to eight people.

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Carrillo, Karen,Steve Harper, Kmar Kashif, & Kelly Sykes. "A Study of the Diet of 17th and 18th Century Africans in New York." N.Y.: OPEI 1993.

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Penner, Lucille Recht. The Colonial Cookbook. New York, 1976. 2nd Printing, 1987.

Stringfield, G.D. "African-American Cooking in Old New York." Through Black Eyes: Revisioning N.Y. History. Sherrill D. Wilson, Editor/ Publisher. Vol.1 No. 2, New York: 1991

Recommended Reading

Low-Fat Soul by Jonell Nash. Ballantine Books, New York: $25.00

The Black Family Reunion Cookbook: Recipes and Food Memories, by the The National Council of Negro Women. Simon & Schuster, 1991, $12.00

Sylvia's Soul Food by Sylvia Woods and Christopher Styler. Hearst Books, 1992, $17.00

Queen Ida: Cooking With Ida "Bon Temps" Creole Recipes (and stories) from Queen of Zydeco Music by Queen Ida Guillory, with Naomi Wise. Prima Publishing: 1990, $22.95

The Africa News Cookbook (African Cooking For Western Kitchens) by African News Service, Inc., Ed. by Tami Hulfman. Penquin Books, 1985, $17.95

A Taste of Africa by Dorinda Hafner: Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, Calif. $16.95

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African Burial Ground Update

(cont. from page 9)

OPEI Mini-calendar of 1997 Events

May 24, 1997 -- OPEI's annual open house event is a day long event which features updates from Howard University, the Foley Square Laboratory and the progress of memorialization and reinterment plans for the site. Lectures, laboratory tours and conducted tours to the site are free to the public.

July 6, 1997 -- Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson and Dr. Michael L. Blakey lecture about the African Burial Ground at the Diggs Gallery at Winston-Salem State University, North Carolina. For information call (910) 750-2458.

June 21, 1997 -- OPEI offers a day long film festival. Documentaries concerning the African Burial Ground and the early history of Africans in New York City will be shown free to the public. Call for reservations.

Aug. 4-8, 1997 -- "Innovative Approaches to Teaching New York City's Early History" is the theme of the week long lecture series which represents the 2nd annual summer institute for educators sponsored by the Museum of the City of New York.

Lectures include "Archaeological Findings: The African Burial Ground" by Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson; "New Amsterdam as a Multi-cultural Community" by Dr. David E. Voorhees, editor of the *Halve Maen* published by the Holland Society, and "Pinkster Day: African American Colonial Music and Dance," presented by Judith Samuel, Ron McBee and the Children of Dahomey. For additional information please call Laura Dickstein, School and Family Programs Coordinator, Museum of the City of New York at (212) 534-1672, ext. 205

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WANTED

AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND VOLUNTEERS

Summer Training Session
Saturday, July 1, 1997

For information and reservations

(212) 432-5707

SITE TOURS AT HOWARD UNIVERSITY

Howard University's Cobb Lab in Washington, D.C. are Fridays from 10:00 - 11:00 a.m. or Saturdays between 10:00 - 12 noon To schedule an appointment please call (202) 806-5252.

In The Next Issue of Update:

- **Strategies for Preserving African Burial Grounds**
- **The Press in Black America**

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